

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Kimberly Alexander, I am a student from Trinity College. I am also an Hartford Organizer with Connecticut Students for a Dream. I am speaking about SB273: AN ACT CONCERNING DEBT-FREE COLLEGE, the bill would enable in-state recent high school graduates enrolled in regional community-technical colleges to graduate without student loans. I am in support of debt free community college education, but I believe changes must be made to the bill to help more students.

I have been living in Hartford with my family for more than half of my life. It is a familiar place filled with warm memories and struggle. I have been in the Hartford Public Schools System up to middle school. From there, I attended Avon High School through the Open Choice program and moved on to graduate and attend Trinity College. For the entirety of my academic life, having good education and educational opportunities was something that was not handed to me. My mother had to search long and hard; enrolling me in various extracurricular academic programs, searching for the right schools and making sacrifices that not many people could. All so that I could receive higher education, something she never had, and eventually move out of our economic struggle. Higher Education represents a “last hope” pathway that would lead to a better future. However, higher education, especially for undocumented students, is barred by financial cost. For some undocumented students, getting through college normally looks like working multiple jobs while taking less classes. This results in taking longer to graduate for college and pursue one’s dreams. Most are unable to bear the cost and look for work instead. No one should be barred from an education due to finances and legal status. It is inhuman and racist. This is why undocumented students should have access to free community college. Education has the power to empower an entire community and this is what will happen by allowing immigrant students to apply for free community college through the institutional aid bill that was passed earlier this year. Please support the undocumented community holistically and consider how the financial barrier and lack of educational opportunities prevents them from pursuing their dreams and uplifting themselves.

My main point

Undocumented students are excluded from SB273 and the program of debt-free community college because the bill requires students to complete the FAFSA. Undocumented students are barred from filling out the FAFSA because most do not have a social security number.

Thank you and I hope the committee will make the necessary changes so that our immigrant students can qualify as well.

Kimberly Alexander